

ACTION POINTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE 27TH MEETING OF THE ASCOBANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

SCIENTIFIC SESSION

(AP = Action Point, R = Recommendation)

Bycatch

1. R) Relevant¹ Parties are strongly urged to ensure as a matter of urgency, that their Navy acousticians engage with porpoise acousticians, pinger manufacturers and other relevant experts at a technical level to work on solutions to enable critical porpoise protection measures² to be implemented before the population goes extinct.

Resource Depletion

2. R) Parties are encouraged to:
 - Contribute to development of the definition of prey depletion in relation to small cetaceans, including consideration of prey quality and reference points, which could be done in collaboration with ICES;
 - Support a thorough investigative analysis of stranded and bycaught cases to ensure that detailed information on cetacean health, body condition, age and reproductive status, pathogen presence and impact, and contaminant burdens, is collected. This is needed to both fully characterise energy balance (body condition) and provide an overall assessment of health, and not just proximal cause of death. Such analyses should be embedded within funding for monitoring of strandings and bycatch;
 - Support work to identify the most appropriate cetacean body condition indices for quantification of the impacts of prey depletion, coordinating with other interested parties
 - Support research on abundance and spatiotemporal overlap of cetaceans and their prey, including non-commercial species, accounting for the vertical dimension of distribution and considering appropriate scales at which to quantify overlap;
 - Ensure that stomach contents and other relevant samples (e.g. tissues for stable isotope analysis) are collected from stranded and bycaught animals during necropsy and that funding is made available for analyses, recognising that knowledge of cetacean diet is not only relevant to identifying prey depletion but also for detecting regime shifts in marine community and ecosystem structure;
 - Where there is evidence of depletion of key prey for cetaceans, recommend appropriate management measures to rebuild depleted prey stocks.

Marine Debris

3. AP) Parties and Secretariat to continue to work closely with IWC on this issue.
4. R) Parties are encouraged to undertake the following activities to improve collection of data on marine debris at sea and highlight areas of overlap with cetacean distributions:
 - To make the collection of data on marine debris more systematic and more standardized.

¹ Parties whose Navies have expressed a concern that the use of acoustic 'pingers' in fisheries may interfere with their anti-submarine capabilities.

² [ASCOBANS Res.9.2](#); [ASCOBANS Res.8.3](#); [ICES Special Request Advice](#) - EU request on emergency measures to prevent bycatch of Baltic Proper harbour porpoise

- To incorporate floating marine debris as an additional explicit technical objective into existing cetacean or marine megafauna surveys, either ship borne or aerial. This is already in place in a number of cases but effort in standardizing methods would enhance quality and comparability of data sets.
5. AP) The Secretariat to establish a Working Group to organise a Marine Debris Workshop, jointly with ACCOBAMS, aimed at better understanding the effects of marine debris on cetaceans and the relationship between marine debris and fisheries. This includes fully developing Terms of Reference to run the workshop (Chair, speakers, invitees). The workshop would be held as the next conference of the European Cetacean Society to consider *inter alia* the following:
- How to improve collection of relevant data from stranded cetaceans, including identifying guidance for appropriate pathology;
 - How to best investigate the relationship between fishing gear and marine debris;
 - Best practice for debris recording for both ingested and entangled materials;
 - Best practice for sampling and recording of micro-debris; and
 - How to best share information between interested scientists.

Members of the Working Group include: Andrew Brownlow, Peter Evans, Christina Fossi, Celia Le Ravallec, Emma Neave-Webb, Mark Simmonds.

Surveys and Research

6. AP) Secretariat to put SCANS and SAMBAH on the agenda of each Advisory Committee meeting. This would facilitate preparations for future surveys, lessons learned on practical and analytical considerations, and reporting on results.

Use of Strandings Records

7. AP) Regarding the web-accessed database for marine mammal strandings and necropsy data, the Secretariat to coordinate with Andrew Brownlow / University of Glasgow to arrange:
- An initial online survey to gauge interest in joining a collaboration which would seek to explore the advantages and challenges in developing an online web-accessed data repository for strandings information.
 - A more detailed online survey seeking to understand drivers for the creation of an online database of marine strandings.
 - A review of existing or planned databases containing marine strandings data.
 - A technical workshop to:
 - a) Identify stakeholder requirement / specifications / concerns for any database;
 - b) consider issues of data ownership;
 - c) Identify technical considerations and operation maintenance;
 - d) Formulate a design brief, including potential outline costs and timescales for the project.
8. AP) ASCOBANS to liaise with ICES, IWC, HELCOM, OSPAR, and ACCOBAMS going forward.

Offshore Renewable Energy

9. AP) Secretariat to establish a Working Group to review the interactions between all forms of marine renewables and small cetaceans, given the considerable current interest in the further rapid development of marine renewables all across the agreement area. The Working Group would:
- Provide a report to the next meeting of the Advisory Committee considering the full range of possible impacts and also appropriate mitigations.

- Consider whether holding a workshop at the next ECS conference would help in this process and if so, to organize such a workshop.
 - Taking into account ASCOBANS Res.8.6, seek to establish criteria for identifying areas of high sensitivity for cetaceans, including consideration of their prey and habitats, with respect to offshore renewable energy development.
10. AP) Parties, with advice from appropriate experts, to identify areas of high sensitivity for cetaceans, including consideration of their prey and habitats, with respect to offshore renewable energy development to inform national planning.
 11. R) Parties are encouraged to undertake long-term monitoring following the installation of renewable energy devices to assess potential displacement of cetaceans.
 12. R) Parties are encouraged to implement all aspects of ASCOBANS Resolution 8.6 *Ocean Energy* as a matter of high priority in light of the recent developments in offshore renewable energy construction.

ASCOBANS Work Plan: Overview of Implementation

13. AP) Secretariat to seek a lead and members for an Intersessional Working Group for Activity 50. *Undertake a work prioritization exercise, involving ranking the different activities of the Work Plan how the Advisory Committee sees fit.* The IWG to report back to AC28.
14. AP) Further to AC26/AP48, Secretariat to seek a lead and members for an Intersessional Working Group for Activity 68. *Consider the relationship of ASCOBANS to other organizations (e.g. OSPAR, HELCOM, IWC, EU Commission, European Topic Centre for Nature Conservation), in order to identify potential duplication or gaps in efforts. Any observations to be communicated to MOP10 in the form of a draft resolution.* The IWG to report back to AC28.

Any Other Scientific Issues

Nord Stream gas leak

15. R) Parties are requested to urgently implement active surveillance of effects of the Nord Stream gas leaks in the Baltic Proper. Monitoring should include effects on the critically endangered Baltic Proper Harbour Porpoise and pinnipeds, for example through examination of stranded animals, as well as effects on sea birds, fish, benthic habitats and water chemistry as well any increased noise in the region.
16. AP) Secretariat to establish a small Working Group to gather additional information on the likely impacts and what should be monitored and report back to the AC as soon as possible. Members of the Working Group to include: Penina Blankett, Lonneke IJsseldijk, Katarzyna Kamińska, Susanne Viker, Andrew Brownlow, Ida Carlén, Maria Morell, Sinéad Murphy, Mark Simmonds, Sandra Striegel.

Dolphin hunt in the Faroe Islands

17. AP) Advisory Committee to send a follow-up letter to the Faroe Islands regarding the mass hunt of Atlantic white-sided dolphins in 2021, including more recent information. First draft (by end of October 2022) will be prepared by Germany, Poland, UK, OceanCare.

Recreational speed crafts

18. AP) Secretariat to establish a Working Group to provide guidance materials to interested Parties on the best ways to mitigate impacts in light of rapid increases in recreational speed craft (RIBs, power boats, and personal watercrafts) in many parts of the ASCOBANS Agreement Area, and concerns for the potential negative impacts upon small cetaceans and

other marine wildlife through disturbance (including risk of physical injury). Members of the Working Group include: Penina Blankett/Olli Loisa, Iwona Pawliczka, Ida Carlén, Peter Evans, Sven Koschinski, Mark Simmonds, Sandra Striegel, Dagmar Struss.

INSTITUTIONAL SESSION

Authority of Working Groups to Act on Urgent Matters

19. The Advisory Committee agreed that if a Working Group / Steering Group concurs by consensus that they need to urgently respond to a burning issue with a letter, the letter shall be shared with the AC Chair and Vice-Chair for review and approval. The AC Chair and Vice-Chair then inform the rest of the Advisory Committee, with a short deadline (that can be decided on a case-by-case basis by the AC Chair and Vice-Chair) according to the urgency of the issue. Technical and scientific comments requested urgently from Working Groups can be submitted without consulting the AC. The above applies to the long-standing ASCOBANS groups, namely Jastarnia and North Sea Groups. For other Working Groups, such communications shall be considered on a case-by-case basis.
20. ASCOBANS Secretariat to discuss with ACCOBAMS Secretariat regarding the procedure for Joint Working Groups to issue letters and other communications. Secretariat to report back to AC28.

Action Points from Working Groups

21. The Advisory Committee agreed that Working Groups may continue producing Action Points and Recommendations from their meetings as they wish, but mark the points that have been carried over, noting the meeting where the point was listed. Where appropriate, the Working Groups shall also mark whether the points are long-term or short-term, add deadlines, incorporate prioritisation, and assess whether existing ones have been implemented.

National Reporting Form

22. The Secretariat to establish an Intersessional Working Group to look at the questions in the current National Report form and assess whether they need to be clarified or additional guidance provided, including to the multiple options for answers. The IWG members include: Penina Blankett, Steve Geelhoed, Katarzyna Kaminska, Monika Lesz, Susanne Viker, Peter Evans. The IWG to report back to AC28.
23. The Secretariat to circulate the list of potential experts for National Report consultations, for update by the AC Members, their advisers, and Chairs of ASCOBANS Working Groups. Deadline: 31 October 2022.

Prioritisation of Activities Requiring Funding

24. The Advisory Committee agreed to prioritise the following activities, in order of priority:
 - Long-term Coordination of the Harbour Porpoise Action Plans
 - Scoping phase: Database for Marine Mammal Stranding and Necropsy Data
 - Workshop with NATO and navies (coordinated with ACCOBAMS)
 - Workshop to review conservation units and their delineation for small cetaceans
 - Joint ASCOBANS-ACCOBAMS Workshop on the Common Dolphin
 - Review of the ASCOBANS Conservation Plan for the HP Population in the Western Baltic, the Belt Sea and the Kattegat
 - 'European Scientific Workshop'

25. The Advisory Committee endorsed the proposals for Workshops regarding Marine Debris and Offshore Renewable Energy, which do not require any substantive funding, but would offer small financial support if necessary, and if available.

Election of Chair of the Advisory Committee

26. The Advisory Committee appointed Katarzyna Kaminska (Poland) as Chair and Anne-Marie Svoboda (the Netherlands) as the Vice-Chair of the AC, for the period from 2023 to 2025.

Date and Venue of the 28th Meeting of the Advisory Committee

27. The Advisory Committee agreed that the tentative dates for AC28 will be 26-28 September 2023. The Secretariat welcomes offers to host this meeting.